

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSM-03 CIAE-00
DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05
PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 ACDA-12 /099 W
-----035954 091759Z /41

P 091357Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1767
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

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E.O.11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, IS
SUBJ: RESERVIST GROUP SENDS BEGIN LETTER CRITICAL OF GOI POLICY

REF: JERUSALEM 662 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: A RESERVIST GROUP OF 350, MOSTLY COMBAT OFFICERS, HAS SENT A LETTER TO PRIME MINISTER BEGIN CRITICIZING GOVERNMENT POLICY. THE FIRST OFFICIAL REACTION ON MARCH 7 WAS A CRITICAL COMMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER'S SPOKESMAN. HOWEVER, ON MARCH 8 BEGIN PROVIDED THE GROUP WITH A WRITTEN REPLY. THE AD HOC RESERVIST GROUP APPEARS TO BE A DOVISH, UNIVERSITY-CENTERED GROUP WITH A LARGE COMPONENT OF KIB-
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BUTZ MEMBERS. AS SUCH IT IS HARDLY REFLECTIVE OF ISRAELI SOCIETY. HOWEVER, IT IS STILL TOO EARLY TO TELL IF THE RESERVISTS' LETTER WILL BE A ONE SHOT DEAL SOON FORGOTTEN OR HAVE A SIGNIFICANT PUBLIC IMPACT. END SUMMARY.

2. IN A LETTER SENT TO PRIME MINISTER ON MAR 7, AN AD HOC RESERVISTS' GROUP OF 350--MOSTLY COMBAT OFFICERS--CALLED

UPON BEGIN TO CHOOSE THE PATH OF PEACE RATHER THAN TERRITORY. ACCORDING TO THE SIGNATORIES, "A GOVERNMENT THAT PREFERS THE EXISTENCE OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL WITHIN THE LAND OF ISRAEL ABOVE PEACE AND GOOD NEIGHBORLY RELATIONS WOULD CAUSE US DIFFICULT REFLECTIONS. A GOVERNMENT THAT PREFERS THE EXISTENCE OF SETTLEMENTS ACROSS THE GREEN LINE TO THE ELIMINATION OF THE HISTORIC CONFLICT AND THE ADVENT OF NORMAL RELATIONS IN OUR AREA WOULD RAISE QUESTIONS AMONG US ABOUT THE JUSTICE OF OUR PATH. A GOVERNMENT POLICY THAT PERPETUATES RULE OVER A MILLION ARABS COULD HARM THE JEWISH-DEMOCRATIC CHARACTER OF THE STATE AND MAKE IT DIFFICULT TO IDENTIFY WITH THE PATH OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL." THE PETITIONERS PROMISED TO FOLLOW EVERY ORDER IF WAR BROKE OUT, BUT THEY NEVERTHELESS WANTED THE PRIME MINISTER TO REMEMBER THAT THEIR RIGHTS AS CITIZENS WERE NOT LESS THAN THOSE OF GUSH EMUNIM AND THE COMPLETE LAND OF ISRAEL MOVEMENT.

3. ACCORDING TO A SPOKESMAN FOR THE GROUP, 80 PERCENT OF THE SIGNATORIES ARE COMBAT OFFICERS. SEVERAL HAVE BEEN AWARDED DECORATIONS. ABOUT 40 PERCENT ARE KIBBUTZ MEMBERS. MOST HAD VOTED FOR LABOR OR THE DMC IN THE LAST ELECTION. HE ADDED THAT THE GROUP PLANNED TO TAKE OUT NEWSPAPER ADVERTISEMENTS CALLING FOR LIKE-MINDED PERSONS TO WRITE TO THEM.

4. IN A MARCH 8 EDITORIAL DAVAR CRITICIZED THE USE BY THE RESERVE OFFICERS OF A POLITICAL FRAMEWORK TO EXPRESS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THEIR VIEWS. HOWEVER, DAVAR RECOGNIZED THAT THE LETTER WOULD PROBABLY NOT HAVE BEEN WRITTEN HAD THE GOVERNMENT NOT Demeaned ITSELF WITH ITS HARMFUL SETTLEMENT POLICY AND INEPT HANDLING OF THE NEGOTIATIONS WITH EGYPT. THE EDITORIAL ADDED THAT "ONE CAN ARGUE WITH THE AUTHORS WHO DRAFTED THE OFFICERS' LETTER, BUT NO ONE WILL DENY THEIR SINCERITY OF MOTIVE AND THEIR RIGHT TO EXPRESS A POINT OF VIEW AND TO INFLUENCE PUBLIC OPINION." ON THE OTHER HAND, THE NRP-AFFILIATED HATZOFEH TERMED THE LETTER A DANGEROUS PRECEDENT OF MILITARY INTERVENTION IN POLITICAL LIFE AND ASSUMED THAT IT WAS INSTIGATED BY ANTI-GOVERNMENT ELEMENTS.

5. THE FIRST OFFICIAL RESPONSE TO THE LETTER WAS A MARCH 7 CRITICAL COMMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER'S SPOKESMAN. HE SAID THE LETTER WOULD BE DEALT WITH IN THE SAME FASHION AS ALL OTHER CORRESPONDENCE AND CRITICIZED THE GROUP FOR RELEASING THE LETTER PUBLICLY BEFORE THE PRIME MINISTER HAD EVEN RECEIVED IT. ACCORDING TO "CIRCLES CLOSE TO THE PRIME MINISTER," THE LETTER WAS AN ATTEMPT TO HARM THE STABILITY OF THE GOVERNMENT.

6. HOWEVER, ON MARCH 8 THE PRIME MINISTER PROVIDED THE GROUP

WITH A WRITTEN REPLY. BEGIN STATED THAT HIS GOVERNMENT

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PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01
SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 ACDA-12 /099 W
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P 091357Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1768
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
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HAS MADE AND IS CONTINUING TO MAKE SUPREME EFFORTS TO
PREVENT WAR AND BRING ABOUT PEACE. HE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT
IT WAS THE RIGHT OF THE PETITIONERS TO STAND BY THEIR
VIEWS. HOWEVER, HE ASKED IF THEY WERE TRYING TO IMPOSE THEIR
VIEWS ON THE DEMOCRATICALLY ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES WHO HAD
BEEN CHOSEN TO CONDUCT THE STATE'S AFFAIRS. BEGIN THEN ASKED
THE OFFICERS TO ANSWER HIM PERSONALLY BY LETTER WHETHER THEY
ACCEPTED ARAB DEMANDS FOR WITHDRAWAL TO THE 1967 BORDERS AND
SELF-DETERMINATION FOR THE RESIDENTS OF JUDEA, SAMARIA AND THE
GAZA STRIP. BEGIN NOTED THAT ACCEPTANCE OF THESE PROPOSALS
WOULD LEAD TO CONTINUOUS BLOODSHED AND WOULD ENDANGER THE
EXISTENCE OF THE STATE. THE PRIME MINISTER EXPRESSED THE HOPE
THAT THE PETITIONERS WOULD REJECT THESE DEMANDS AND ALLOW
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THE ELECTED GOVERNMENT TO CONDUCT THE PEACE NEGOTIATIONS IN ITS OWN WAY. BEGIN ADDED THAT GOOD CITIZENS SHOULD NOT MAKE THE GOVERNMENT'S TASK MORE DIFFICULT, BUT MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO STRENGTHEN THE GOVERNMENT WHICH WHOLEHEARTEDLY WANTS PEACE.

7. COMMENT: UNLIKE A LETTER FIVE WEEKS AGO FROM A GROUP OF TEL AVIV HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS, WHICH CALLED FOR ISRAEL TO WITHDRAW FROM THE TERRITORIES AND RECOGNIZE THE RIGHT OF THE PALESTINIANS TO SELF-DETERMINATION, THE RESERVISTS' LETTER WAS SOMETHING THAT BEGIN HAD TO ADDRESS SERIOUSLY. THIS WAS THE FIRST TIME SINCE THE END OF THE YOM KIPPUR WAR THAT RESERVISTS HAD UNITED AS A GROUP TO OPPOSE GOVERNMENT POLICIES.

8. THE RESERVISTS APPEAR TO BE A DOVISH, UNIVERSITY-CENTERED GROUP WITH A LARGE COMPONENT OF KIBBUTZ MEMBERS. AS SUCH IT IS HARDLY REFLECTIVE OF ISRAELI SOCIETY. IT ALSO APPEARS TO BE AN AD HOC GROUP WHICH, LIKE THE PROTEST GROUPS WHICH MUSHROOMED IN 1973/74, MAY HAVE LITTLE STAYING POWER. DAVAR CLAIMS THAT THE RESERVISTS' LETTER IS THE FIRST IN WHAT WILL BE A WAVE OF PROTESTS DIRECTED AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT'S SETTLEMENT AND NEGOTIATING POLICIES. HOWEVER, IT IS STILL TOO EARLY TO TELL IF THE LETTER WILL BE A ONE-SHOT DEAL SOON FORGOTTEN OR HAVE A SIGNIFICANT PUBLIC IMPACT. LEWIS

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